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TOS: Before and After Delectable Vegetables Ticket Out of Poverty

Communities come together, form associations, produce, export products and savor a new life

Overview

José Luis Lux is a vegetable producer in the community of Chirijuyú in Tecpán, Chimaltenango. His family, like every other family in the village, has lived in extreme poverty. They did not have an adequate house, nor did they have a school to send their children to.

That began to change in 1993 when the community established an association of agricultural producers called “Labradores Mayas”. The association was 40 people working in the fields and five in the new packaging plant. The vegetables they raised were sold to middlemen who determined the income from produce.

Then, in 2003, an AGEXPORT (Trade Association for Non-traditional Exports) supply chain alliance specialist visited Labradores. He perceived these farmers as a well-organized group with strong leaders and the determination to accomplish their goal to improve community well-being.

The specialist engaged support from the USAID/AGEXPORT Supply Chain Alliance Program and with this, Labradores strengthened production and became certified for Good Agricultural and Manufacturing Practices. They also systematized administrative functions to comply with international buyer requirements so they can compete in international markets. It paid off: In 2006, Wal-Mart signed up Labradores to supply vegetables and fruits to the tune of approximately \$14,500 per week of export quality lettuce, carrots, celery and broccoli.

A mere decade later, Labradores Mayas has become one of Wal-Mart Central America’s main suppliers. More than 87 families work for Labradores Mayas--165 people work in the fields and 28, mostly women, work in the packaging plant.

Before: Families live in hamlets and eeked out a subsistence living from the fertile volcanic plots around them. Most lived in extreme poverty with dirt floors, no running water, never enough to eat, no school nearby for children and youth to go to.



After : “A couple of months ago, a group of producers from other areas came to ask us to protest with them against CAFTA, the new Free Trade Agreement. Our answer was that we did not fear CAFTA, on the contrary, we were eager for it to be signed because we were ready! We are now receiving orders from different parts of the world. Yesterday I received an e-mail from Canada, asking for a weekly container of fresh broccoli!”

“More women can earn money now and we learned about hygiene standards for the packaging plant that we now use at home and we don’t get sick as often” says Mr. Lux’s wife.



Women and men working inside the Labradores Mayas packing plant.